

As a member of the Ely City Council who has chosen to relocate to Ely with my family, I am uniquely positioned to talk about the importance of this to my family and our community.

Residents here, symbolized by our families specifically, choose to live here for a variety of reasons including the natural beauty of our surroundings, the lifestyle that we all enjoy and the desire to live near family and friends. Unfortunately, that choice is increasingly a difficult one for residents trying to raise a family, buy a home, grow a business, sustain a business, afford college education for their children or fund a retirement. Simply put, if communities like ours are going to be economically viable in the future, families need access to the services and capabilities delivered through high-speed connections to their homes. Increasingly, in remote areas and elsewhere, those connections are delivered wirelessly.

Wireless broadband enables residents to start home-based businesses, telecommute or provide goods and services here in Ely, Minneapolis or anywhere in the country or world. It bridges the digital divide between rural and urban areas. It also gives resident access to telehealth applications, distance learning, the latest smartphones, tablets and other wireless devices and a host of other services and capabilities. It puts Ely on the same page as the rest of the world. It gives our families and our communities a chance to compete and succeed in this new economy, not be left behind at the end of the road.

Geography in the 21st Century should not be an impediment to making a living or enjoying the fruits of our labor. And it does not have to be. In fact, the Obama administration has set a goal to ensure that 98% of Americans have access to high-speed wireless services within the next five years. To help make this goal a reality, it is vital for our state and national leaders, the FCC and Congress to do all they can to make ubiquitous broadband a reality. There is no better current example of that than the proposed AT&T acquisition of T-Mobile. Congress and the FCC should act swiftly to approve that combination. A combined AT&T-T-Mobile would pay dividends for rural communities like ours and result in a significant investment in hyper-speed wireless broadband across Northeast Minnesota.

This merger should become a reality. I urge the FCC to make it so, as a VERIZON customer.

Thank you.

Heidi Omerza

Ely City Council